

# Autism Spectrum Disorder in the workplace:

## How does the timing of disclosure decisions affect selection ratings?

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### BACKGROUND

Individuals with disabilities continue to be one of the largest unemployed groups in the United States (BLS, 2020). For physical disabilities, research shows that unemployment rates tend to be lower than those with learning or developmental disabilities (Roberts & Macan, 2006; Summer & Brown, 2015).

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), continue to be an underemployed population within the U.S. In the United States, the diagnostic rate for ASD continues to increase, therefore individuals with ASD seeking practical work experiences will also increase. While laws protect applicants and employees with ASD, the role that possible bias and attitudes towards individuals with ASD and how those might impact those seeking employment, is under researched.

Research on ASD in children is extensive and vast, yet there is a dearth of research studying adults with ASD, especially in terms of employment (Hendricks, 2010). Many of the challenges faced in the employment of individuals with an ASD diagnosis start in the initial job search and extend into the interview process (Hendricks, 2010).

### ABSTRACT

Despite the increase of working adults with an ASD diagnosis in society (Burgess & Cimera, 2014; Hensel, 2017), research has not addressed whether disclosure of one's ASD diagnosis results in differing decision-making outcomes as it relates to hiring and selection in the workplace. As more individuals with ASD enter the workforce, the need to know whether their diagnosis may serve as a limiting factor in this process will be a pressing concern of this population. The goal of this research aims to provide some initial insight as to when and how to disclose one's diagnosis to not only ensure their protection through current ADA laws, but also to instill a sense of confidence in these individuals as they pursue careers in a working society.

### INTRODUCTION

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is categorized as a developmental disability affecting social, cognitive, and sometimes physical responses (CDC, 2020)
  - Many individuals on the ASD spectrum also follow tight patterns of repetitive behaviors and speech.
- ASD & Employment
  - According to Autism Speaks, within the next decade between 700,000 and 1,116,000 teens diagnosed with ASD will become working age adolescents
  - Research reveals there are many benefits to hiring individuals on the spectrum including proficiency in visual skills, sciences, mathematics, high attention to detail, intense concentration in their personal fields of interest, high reliability, willingness to do repetitive work, and decreased absenteeism (Hensel, 2017; Hendricks, 2010; Patton, 2019)
- Selection & Disclosure
  - In the work environment, disclosure has been known to effect job satisfaction and job anxiety (Griffith & Hebl, 2002)
  - Selection is the process of gathering and evaluating information about an individual to make an employment decision
- Hypotheses
  - H1: Early disclosure of the candidate's autism diagnosis will result in participants providing higher interview ratings for specific interview questions compared when the candidate makes no disclosure or late disclosure.
  - H2: Disclosure of the candidate's autism diagnosis result in participants providing higher Overall/Global Interview Ratings compared to when the candidate makes no disclosure.
  - H3: Early disclosure of the candidate's autism diagnosis result in participants providing higher Overall/Global Interview Ratings compared to when the candidate makes no disclosure or late disclosure.
  - H4: Disclosure of the candidate's autism diagnosis result in participants being more likely to recommend hiring the candidate compared to when the candidate makes no disclosure.
  - H5: Early disclosure of the candidate's autism diagnosis will result in participants being more likely to recommend hiring the candidate compared to when the candidate makes no disclosure or late disclosure.
  - H6: Late disclosure of the candidate's autism diagnosis will result in participants being more likely to recommend hiring the candidate compared to when the candidate makes no disclosure.

### METHOD

- Participants
  - MTSU students, MTurk Participants, HR Professionals
- Measures
  - Societal Attitudes Towards Autism Scale
    - Reliability= 0.86 M = 28.14, median = 28, SD = 6.30; n = 461
  - Interview Experience
    - Measure participants previous experience with interviewing
  - Autism Spectrum Disorders and Higher Education (Adapted from White et al., 2019)
    - Measures previous knowledge of ASD
  - Level & Quantity of Contact Report (Adapted from Gardiner, E & Larocci, G, 2014)
    - Measures quality and quantity of contact with individuals on the spectrum
  - Quality of Contact of Outgroup Contact (Adapted from Popan, Kenworthy, Frame, Lyons, and Snuggs 2009 )
    - Financial results and flight delays from simulation represent realistic measures of group performance

### ANTICIPATED RESULTS

- Results are intended to support the hypotheses, such that disclosure will lead to higher interview ratings for specific questions and/or overall/global interview ratings compared to no disclosure at all and me bore likely to recommend hiring.

### DISCUSSION

- Implications
  - Being willing to disclose one's ASD diagnosis will provide more fair and accurate hiring decisions
  - Timing of disclosure will not effect selection rate as much as deciding not to disclose at all
  - HR hiring managers will understand new attributions and processes that may take place when hiring individuals with disabilities
- Limitations
  - An actor portraying limited characteristics of ASD may not generalize to the entire population, especially due to the unique manifestation of ASD
  - Role of tax preparer does generalize to all employment options
- Future Directions
  - Examine the contrast between making a hiring decision between equally qualified candidates, one have ASD, the other neurotypical
  - Further examine the relationship of disclosure and selection analyzing specific sex and race attributes
- Conclusion
  - Timing of an ASD diagnosis disclosure may be impact selection ratings and should subsequently be considered during the interview process.